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ABSTRACT

The local education fund (LEF) movement started in the early 1980s, when public schools were struggling with changing demographics and a need for greater community commitment to public education. Small, independent, community-based organizations were established to bridge the gap between schools and communities. More recently, the Public Education Network (PEN), the national representative for over 70 LEFs nationwide, has begun specifying what its unique contribution to education has been and will be. The Urban Institute has worked to support emerging research around LEF leadership. This report examines efforts by the Urban Institute and PEN to describe a leadership model that characterizes the LEF movement. Data from interviews with LEF executive directors and founders highlight four themes: LEF leaders create a space for sustained collaboration in communities; although LEF leaders are invested in their communities in terms of socioeconomic status and race, they are not typically representative of the communities they serve; LEF leadership appears to involve making strategic choices in an environment of constraints; and LEF leadership fits well in an adaptive leadership framework. The report recommends a two-pronged approach to future studies of LEF leadership. Three appendixes present founding director interview summaries, founding director telephone interview protocol, and topics to be explored in future research. (SM)

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Leading Ways:
Preliminary Research on LEF Leadership for the Public Education Network

Jacqueline Raphael
Alissa Anderson

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Executive Summary

The LEF movement started in the early 1980s, when public schools, particularly in urban areas, were struggling with changing demographics and a need for greater community commitment to public education. These small independent community-based organizations were established to bridge the gap between the community and its schools.

Almost twenty years later, the Public Education Network (PEN), the national representative for over 70 LEFs throughout the country, has begun to specify what its unique contribution to education has been and, subsequently, will be in the future. An important part of this work is the development of a research agenda around LEF leadership.

Thus far, the Urban Institute has engaged in several activities to support this emerging research. First, in June, 2001, researchers administered and analyzed results of a survey of all current LEF executive directors. The results provided a snapshot of leadership characteristics and attitudes. Second, in May and June, 2002, researchers reviewed existing literature on LEFs and nonprofit leadership and interviewed several individuals about the beginnings of the LEF movement. Third, in July and August, 2002, researchers conducted 60- to 90-minute telephone interviews with ten founding directors of early LEFs.

This report describes efforts by the Urban Institute and PEN to better understand and describe a leadership model that characterizes the LEF movement. Looking across the research conducted to date, the following themes emerge:

- *LEF leaders create a space for sustained collaboration in communities.* Founders in particular see their work as establishing *unique* and *lasting* forums in their communities. In some ways this theme encompasses those that follow below, as it grounds the study of LEF leadership in a broad description of the LEF.

- *Although LEF leaders are extremely invested in their communities in terms of socio-economic status and race they are not typically representative of the communities their LEFs serve.* This leads us to question whether they effectively engage all segments of the community in their work. Inclusiveness, then, is a key issue to explore further as it pertains to LEF leadership.

- *LEF leadership appears to involve making strategic choices in an environment of constraints.* With limited human and financial resources, LEFs must attempt to achieve their goals through a complex interaction with their communities and schools. Key stages in LEF development include the transition to community engagement and systemic reform. However, not all LEFs follow the same developmental pattern.

- *LEF leadership fits well in an adaptive leadership framework, in which the director educates his or herself about community values and brings to the surface issues that must be resolved through collaborative action.* Adaptive leaders mobilize others around a community consensus rather than dictate a solution. In the case of LEFs, leadership is exercised through the development of key relationships. These relationships involve community members, principals, government officials, local businesses, and other stakeholders. Because LEFs are meant to provide a permanent venue for collaboration, these relationships are not only instrumental but ends in themselves.

The report recommends a two-pronged approach to future studies of LEF leadership. First, because preliminary research has already yielded useful themes to pursue, we suggest beginning with a small number of initial case studies about early founders. The story of founders' experiences, told through their own and their community's perspective, can be the source of an in-depth examination of the complex nature of LEF leadership. Then, case studies could be followed by a broader data collection activity, such as a survey of all current directors, to expand on findings from the first survey and to test themes emerging from the case studies. A survey instrument could also be used to identify other areas of interest, such as "next generation" leaders, for subsequent studies of LEF leadership. Results from a well-planned research agenda would serve as a valuable guide for PEN's future organizational development efforts.

The Beginning of the LEF Movement

The local education fund (LEF) movement began at a time when public schools, particularly in urban areas, were grappling with the complex challenges of a shifting socio-political environment. After a decade of recession and deindustrialization, many communities faced increased poverty and dire social problems. Middle-class flight from cities left lower-income people, especially poor people of color, increasingly isolated. Consequently, when public schools desperately needed more resources to serve students with greater needs, they were left with an eroded tax base from which to draw funding.

While the crisis in public education had been building throughout the 1970s, it did not receive widespread national attention until the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. This report accused the nation of committing an act of "educational disarmament," claiming that deterioration of the public education system posed a risk to American industry, democracy, and social progress. It reminded the nation that all citizens have an obligation to promote educational excellence for U.S. students.

It was in this context, in the early to mid 1980s, that LEFs emerged, many with startup funds provided by the Ford Foundation through the Public Education Fund (PEF). Founded in 1983 with an initial five-year grant, PEF's mission was to foster development of LEFs.[1] In communities across the country, LEF founders began to mobilize parents, local business and corporate leaders, politicians, and others to improve their local public education systems. Establishing an organization that brought together stakeholders who had not collaborated previously required a special kind of leader. It is this leadership model that is of interest to the Public Education Network (PEN), a national organization that developed from PEF, in the late 1980s, to connect and amplify the work of LEFs across the country. Starting in 2001, PEN began working with researchers to better understand and describe a leadership model that applies to the LEF movement. This report describes efforts by PEN and the Urban Institute to engage in this investigation.

Defining a Research Agenda for the Study of LEF Leadership

Over the last 20 years, PEN and its predecessor organization, PEF, have played a major role in starting, promoting, convening, and nurturing LEFs. Currently, PEN is also engaging in theory-building activities, including describing its own theory of action. As part of this theory-building, the organization has begun to define a research agenda that will: contribute practically to PEN's efforts to support LEFs; build a body of knowledge about the work of LEFs and their impact on communities

[1] Although PEF was not intended to be a permanent organization, LEF need for a national support organization gave rise to a second three-year grant after the initial grant ended. Renamed the Public Education Fund Network, this organization relocated to Washington, DC, in 1991, and in 1995 changed its name to the Public Education Network, its current title.

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and schools; and contribute more broadly to an understanding of the efforts of community-based intermediary organizations in influencing education reform.

In 1998, PEN commissioned *From the Margins to the Center of School Reform: A look at the work of local education funds in seventeen communities* (Useem, 1999), a foundational study that systemically describes the work of LEFs, including LEF organizational characteristics, core areas of work, and conditions for effective work. Useem's report concludes that the LEFs' capacity for improving student outcomes depends on the skill of their board of directors and executive directors, particularly because most LEFs are "lean," with a very small staff in light of their ambitious missions. She writes that, "While resilient, the LEFs also remain fragile. It would be wise for future research to focus on the ways [LEFs] œpe with internal organizational challenges," particularly the demands placed on LEF leaders. Their greatest demands, Useem notes, include: coping with a shrunken funding landscape for nonprofits; motivating and retaining underpaid staff; and responding constructively to the idiosyncrasies of bureaucratic school districts, the politics of urban schools, and the challenges of supporting schools in serving a rapidly changing student population (28-29).

PEN has framed its approach to leadership around three important subgroups that could be studied in the future:

- *Founding directors*, who founded, or were the first directors of, early LEFs established in the 1980s. The experiences of these directors describe much about the roots of the LEF movement and are an important piece of LEF history. Some of these early founders have remained in their leadership positions for many years and offer an opportunity to study their ability to adapt to a changing environment.
- *Transitioning directors*, who have taken over from founding directors. The challenge of succeeding a founding director, often a visionary, is a rich area of study. Having a better understanding of succession would contribute to several fields of inquiry and help PEN in its efforts to support these directors.
- *New or "next generation" executive directors*, who lead LEFs that were created in a wholly different environment regarding education reform, accountability, and community involvement than their forerunners.

The Urban Institute reviewed existing literature and conducted data collection activities to develop, in collaboration with PEN, a roadmap for future study of the leadership of LEFs. This report describes themes that were drawn from the findings.

Executive director survey

The first effort, a survey administered to current directors of 59 LEFs in PEN in June, 2001,[2] examined the roles and responsibilities of current LEF executive

[2] When this study was conducted, PEN included 59 LEFs. Currently PEN includes 71 LEFs.

directors in order to lay a foundation for a more complex study of LEF leadership. Although PEN conducts an annual LEF survey of current directors, little systematic data has been collected on individual leaders. The results provide a snapshot of leadership characteristics and attitudes, as well as contextual information about LEFs and communities.[3] The development of the survey was informed by literature on leadership including Chrislip and Larson (1994) and Nanus and Dobbs (1999). A key finding emerging from this study is the perceived value of (and need for more) strategic planning among LEF leaders. Executive directors reported spending more time managing programs than they would like. Though this predicament is not uncommon for small nonprofits with few staff, the implications of the gap between needs and actions is an important area for future study. What would strategic planning accomplish, and what would it allow LEFs to do differently? Survey results did not specify exactly what respondents meant by "strategic planning."

Other findings included differences in background and experience that exist between new (in their position for four years or less) and longer-term directors, including a decreased likelihood of new directors to live in the community served by their LEF. This is likely a result of changing demographics in cities in general, particularly given a finding that LEF directors tend to be white and middle-income while the students in the districts they serve tend to be non-white and lower-income.

Interviews with founders

The second data collection activity included telephone interviews, conducted in July and August, 2002, with founders of early LEFs.[4] These interviews explored the context in which LEFs were founded and the types of activities in which their leaders initially engaged. Conceived as a planning activity for in-depth case studies of early long-standing LEFs and the leaders who shaped the LEF movement, this study was designed to produce themes for subsequent research.

To prepare for these interviews, the researchers reviewed literature on LEFs, including Useem (1999), Bergholz (1992), and Puriefoy (2001), as well as individual LEF reports archived by PEN. They also explored the concept of "adaptive leadership" developed in Heifetz (1994). The researchers interviewed several individuals about the early LEF founders, including: David Bergholz, who established LEFs around the nation as part of his role with PEF; Paul Reville, a founding director of an early LEF now on PEN's board of directors and research committee; and Marge Hiller, a founding director of an early LEF and a PEN board member.

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[3] See Raphael, J. and Anderson, A. (2001). *The Public Education Network Study of Local Education Fund Leadership: Report on Baseline Survey Findings.* Reported submitted by the Urban Institute to the Public Education Network. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

[4] Included in this discussion of founders are initial directors, who were brought in to lead the LEF after it had been founded.

These interviews, and the review of literature, provided a context to help researchers develop and refine questions to be asked of LEF directors.

The researchers then received from PEN a list of 21 founding LEF directors, most of whom started their LEF in the 1980s. The researchers called directors to ask them each to participate in a 60- to 90-minute telephone interview. The final selection of ten founders (below) resulted in a fairly diverse representation of LEFs by geographic location, founding year, and size.[5] Researchers conducted the interviews using a semi-structured interview protocol. (See Appendix B for a copy of the protocol.)

Table I: Founding directors interviewed

Local Education Fund	Location	Founding Year
Washington Parent Group Fund	Washington, DC	1981
Mon Valley Education Consortium	McKeesport, Pennsylvania	1983
Paterson Education Foundation, Inc.	Paterson, New Jersey	1983
Los Angeles Educational Partnership	Los Angeles, California	1984
Public Education and Business Coalition	Denver, Colorado	1984
Forward in the Fifth	Berea, Kentucky	1986
Nashville Public Education Foundation	Nashville, Tennessee	1987
Lincoln Public School Foundation	Lincoln, Nebraska	1989
Charlotte Advocates for Education	Charlotte, North Carolina	1991
Portland Schools Foundation	Portland, Oregon	1994

Themes Emerging from the Research: Creating a Space for Sustained Collaboration in Communities

From the results of the executive director survey, the review of earlier research, and the telephone interviews with early founders, several themes have emerged about LEF leadership.[6]

Consistently, we heard founders talk about their LEF as the first organization of its kind in their community that brought together a wide range of stakeholders around education reform. No such venue or forum — informal or formal — existed previously, and the education system lacked the will and/or the capacity to elicit broad support. Everyone had a right to be "at the table," in the words of one founder, but first, the "table" had to be created. An overall theme, then, of *creating a space for sustained collaboration in communities*, summarizes the role of these early LEFs.

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[5] Appendix A includes short summaries of each interview with an LEF founder.

[6] Most of the founders interviewed held the position of LEF executive director for ten years or longer. Thus they provided information about issues that extended beyond the early founding period.

The LEF founders clearly saw their job as establishing a *unique* and *lasting* entity in their communities. They were to carve out a figurative space in their communities in which stakeholders, who had not worked together previously, could collaborate to improve public education. This job differs from creating a new watchdog or service organization, those organizations having a purpose that can be achieved by experts in specific tasks. Creating an LEF involved building a new vehicle for community involvement and change, which meant creating new relationships in the community.

Furthermore, founders sought to bridge the gap between schools and the community by building a permanent bridge: the LEF, which, unlike some mission-based organizations, would *not* close its doors once its goals were achieved. As one LEF founder put it, "What we did from Day 1 was think about what our legacy would be. We wanted to leave something behind. We felt that it was very important that public education and learning should hold a premier place of importance in every community that our organization touched." For most LEFs, this meant staying in business as long as schools were in business.

Below are prominent themes that fall under this overall theme. We begin with the individuals who fulfilled a leadership role, describe the strategies employed by LEF leaders, explain features of the particular leadership exercised by leaders, and end with a mention of key ways in which PEN facilitated LEF development.

Who are the leaders?

LEF executive directors, and particularly founders of early LEFs, are a fairly homogenous group. Results from the executive director survey suggest that current directors tend to be white, female, and highly educated. Slightly more new executive directors are male, but the great majority (74%) are female. As for income level, although the executive director survey and telephone interviews with founders did not probe this issue, many comments from founders suggest that they were financially secure, allowing them to donate large amounts of time to their work as LEF director. Many of the founders started with LEFs as part of their re-entry into the workforce after raising children, for example.

Early LEF founders were engaged in community politics through local political organizations such as the League of Women Voters. Many had also been involved in local schools, not typically as an educator, but as a volunteer leader, such as a PTA president. In the beginning, it appears to have mattered (at least to them) that their children had attended the local public schools. But this and other links are shifting: the executive director survey reveals that newer directors are less likely to live in the communities that are directly served by their LEFs, a trend that may be related to middle-class flight. Similarly, one founder questioned whether current LEF directors typically send their children to the public schools served by their LEFs.

To create new and unique conversations and partnerships within their communities, founders possessed distinctive capabilities. They could accomplish many startup tasks: raise funds, engage stakeholders, establish relationships with the school system and schools, and talk to the media. Many founders worked closely with board members or other community leaders to accomplish these tasks. But whether they did all these tasks themselves – the "jack of all trades," according to David Bergholz — or with colleagues, the founders had to be capable of managing a startup. They either created the vision that was guiding the new LEF, or someone, such as a board of directors, trusted them to take on this role. According to Bergholz, the founders were active, tough-minded, focused, and capable of "making things happen." One founder agreed that being able to keep the focus in mind is critical to being an LEF director because so many people — parents, teachers, community members — approach the director thinking only of their own personal concerns. The director has to be able to weigh these concerns and derive feasible solutions for complex problems.

LEF founders were perceived as extremely reliable people. They were seen as trustworthy, credible, and not "out for themselves." When asked what they felt qualified them to serve as founding leaders, LEF founders acknowledged that it was critical to their success that they be viewed as "fair" and "objective" by key players — echoing responses from the background interviews. LEF founders tended to be good listeners and communicators and felt this skill was critical to their leadership. Some — though not all — of the founders also eschewed taking "center stage" in the organization and in the community, giving their board members the lion's share of credit for LEF successes and creating collaborative efforts with schools and other organizations rather than tackling large projects on their own. Founders also had to carefully carve out the LEF role in an environment with multiple bureaucratic players. Knowing whose responsibilities not to take on, such as the Board of Education's, was important to them. Whether this leadership style is related to the founders' gender would be interesting to explore in further research.

LEF founders had to maintain high levels of energy and enthusiasm for public school reform — a challenge, they said, because of the "fuzzy" and "intangible" nature of school reform issues. Change occurs slowly in education, making it difficult to keep a board of directors and other stakeholders inspired over time. Founders also have to persuade community members that education, with its tax funding base, needs their financial support.

Finally, LEF leaders are extremely invested in this work. Their privilege notwithstanding, they tackle great challenges, and make personal sacrifices, because of their personal commitment to the LEF. Indeed, the 2001 survey indicates that current executive directors are spending an average of 52 hours per week in their jobs, despite fairly low salaries. At the same time, not a single current executive director reported being dissatisfied with his or her job.

Such a great degree of investment can cause difficulties over the long haul, however. Several founding directors alluded to stresses associated with LEF leadership. One founder admitted being unsure how much longer she could continue in her position because of the stresses, frustrations, and excruciatingly slow pace of change. In a more extreme case, another founder said the work had affected her health, leading her to take a hiatus and ultimately leave the job. Future research can identify ways that LEF leaders maximize their organizational capacity given limited resources and the high levels of investment that this work demands.

In most cases, LEF leadership is influenced by the board of directors. PEN survey data,[7] summarized in the report on executive director survey results, suggest that board members, too, are a relatively homogenous group: 63 percent are male and 78 percent are white. Furthermore, only 57 percent of executive directors surveyed felt that their board of directors is representative of the community it serves, though they rated their boards highly in other areas (Raphael and Anderson, 2001). However, the interviews with directors suggest that boards may be becoming more inclusive. One director said, for instance, "The younger leadership that we brought to the board... is more diverse than ever. It has learned to talk about race and class issues more openly and moved the conversation to other venues than our board meetings."

What strategies were employed by LEF leaders?

Wendy Puriefoy's characterization of LEFs as "small organizations with big missions" is borne out by several sources, including Useem (1999), who describes LEFs as "lean" in terms of staff and resources, yet innovative in their reform approach and unafraid of controversy (p. 8). PEN survey data, summarized in the executive director survey report, reveals that half of the LEFs in 2000 had a staff of six or less, of which two members, on average, are part-time staff members. The leaders' awareness that their missions are large and complex is reflected in a finding from the executive director survey: that executive directors on average reported that although strategic planning is the activity on which ideally they would like to spend the most time, relative to other activities, it is the activity on which they spend the *least* amount of time (Raphael and Anderson, 2001). Directors are spending more time than they wish on managing programs and fundraising, a reflection of the challenges they face as small nonprofit organizations.

Indeed, LEFs face an extremely challenging task in creating a space in their communities for collaboration around education. In the 1980s, when the early LEFs began, their founders were trying to build consensus around an issue that had only begun to be perceived as a "public" concern. *A Nation at Risk* and other reports on education published in this period suggested that public education had to be "fixed." But the public, including the business community, had not taken the reins previously. And because LEF founders were seeking a broad consensus, across a full range of

[7] Based on 2000 member survey data collected by PEN.

stakeholders, the job was doubly difficult. Certainly, any community-based organization bringing multiple players together around an issue will face challenges. But LEFs sought to bring *everyone* to the table, including stakeholders who had not collaborated before. Such a high level of collaboration increased the number of discussions, flyers, ideas, and dollars needed to do the job well.

Despite these constraints, LEF leaders are compelled to think strategically about how to accomplish their goals. As Elizabeth Useem (1999) wrote in *From the Margins to the Center of School Reform*, "Boards of directors and LEF staff wrestle constantly with questions of strategy, trying to figure out how to target their time and money in order to leverage their broadest long-term impact on educational practices and policies" (pp. 26-27). These strategic decisions involve external and internal events, urgencies originating in state or local legislation or judicial happenings, etc. In interviews with founders of early LEFs, we learn that over time, they reach out to three primary constituent groups: schools, school districts, and the community. Important points in the developmental growth of LEFs included the following:

- *The use of teacher minigrants.* Repeatedly, we were told that the teacher minigrant program was an important first step to developing a working relationship with schools and districts. One founder said she created her LEF's "foundation" through this work, as the program produced tangible benefits and was very popular in schools. In Mon Valley, the popularity of the minigrant program in one district led nineteen other district superintendents to contact the founder about participation, a clear indication of the power of this program. In addition, succeeding at other programs, such as those discussed above, also developed the LEF's visibility and credibility.

- *Information dissemination to the public.* Many LEFs took on this role early in their history. Forward in the Fifth, for example, tackled the job of explaining the Kentucky Education Reform Act to the public. Several LEFs explained procedural issues such as what a school board does, how a school or district budget works, etc. More complex issues also were tackled. In 1999, the Paterson Education Fund has tried to influence policy by conducting "conversations" about race and education with 150 people from the city. Notes from these talks were used to draw up a community-wide agenda for change that the Fund actively promotes.

- *Implementing projects in schools.* Most LEFs provide services to schools and/or districts. Typically, these involved staff development, community/school collaborations, and between-school/district-wide initiatives. Several founders described projects that could be considered prototypes for reforms currently popular in education. For example, Mon Valley Education Consortium replied to an RFP issued by the state to develop cadres of lead teachers in area schools. Mon Valley's response to the RFP was unique among the seven sites funded. The LEF

program required school staff consensus on the selection of teacher leaders, rather than having the principal choose them, and called for schools to devise their own goals and agenda rather than following a pre-determined plan. These ideas have turned out to be key to many current school reform models. Similarly, the Public Education and Business Coalition used collaborative teams, made up of university experts and teachers, to plan and deliver professional development to area schools. The LEF also involved local schools in the development of a K-12 school of choice with the Colorado Outward Bound School. The Comprehensive Health Centers program promoted by PEN may also have resulted in precursors to current community school models, though we did not learn about these in our interviews.

In addition to these similarities, some themes distinguish LEFs and demonstrate how no one "story" or progression can describe all LEFs adequately:

- *Incorporating bottom-up and top-down approaches.* Nearly all LEFs do some work "in the trenches" helping schools develop capacity, but some founders found it necessary to deal with the district as their LEF grew. For example, the founder of the Mon Valley Education Consortium did not want the LEF to resemble a regional school reform organization, emphasizing the LEF's role as convener, broker, and advocate. Yet the Portland founder said that if an LEF "wants to be serious about the vision of high-performing schools for all kids, it has to be mindful of district conditions and leadership. You're pushing a very big boulder up a very big mountain if you do it outside in. I don't think this work works without district coherence and leadership." Denver's founder agreed: "If you don't have a high-level district person involved, you can end up just banging your head against the wall."

- *Making the transition to community engagement.* Most, but not all, LEFs evolve toward a greater community engagement role. Charlotte, founded in 1991, did so more quickly than most. By addressing a crucial school board election issue early in its development, the Fund found itself launching a major public information campaign, clearly on a community engagement path. Factors that contributed to a quick transition included mentoring received directly from PEN; good financial support from its inception; a strong board willing to tackle tough issues; and a supportive superintendent. Other LEFs made this transition well after they had been launched. Paterson's initial years were relatively traditional, for example, but state takeover of the district in 1991 thrust the LEF into a much more politicized environment. Though the Board was reluctant to take this route, the founder helped them see that they had to get involved to be a key player in local education. The Los Angeles Educational Partnership also developed along these lines to become a well-rounded organization that is fairly independent of the school district. Contributing factors included an excellent referral of large

funding streams to the LEF by PEF, and a superintendent who stressed the importance of the LEF's independence.

Yet not all LEFs have made or will make the transition to full community engagement. Two founders described ongoing challenges to this shift. In Lincoln, the board and the district superintendent, who helped formulate the LEF's initial vision, were not always eager to move in this direction. Portland, too, was not accepted fully by superintendents less open to an independent third party's involvement in education. Funding and politics proved more of a challenge there. Furthermore, not all LEFs are headed in this direction. The Washington Parent Group Fund stayed true to its focus on parent training, with little change. Others seem to prefer acting only with clear district support.

- *Making the transition to systemic reform.* At least half of the founders talked about a shift from teacher mini-grants and other "niche-filling" activities to more systemic education reform activities through large-scale initiatives that changed how schools and districts operated. Most credited the large PEN grants — Library Power and the Comprehensive School Health Initiative — as a major force in developing the LEF's ability to do so.

- *Carving out turf.* In some communities, LEFs have to work with other organizations to negotiate their roles. The Nashville Public Education Foundation, for example, collaborates with other organizations and will respect other organizations' turf, e.g., not sending volunteers into schools because another organization plays this role. This represents the type of coordination that allows community-wide efforts to thrive. But in some LEFs, these turf issues presented serious challenges. The founder of the Washington Parent Group Fund had to spend enormous resources to defuse tensions created by another city group working with parents in a more politically charged way.

These themes indicate that certain key shifts occur across the lifetime of individual LEFs. Many of these are related to creative tensions at the core of the LEF vision, including the tension between programming and policy, between "critical" and "friend" in the "critical friend" relationship, and between dealing with individual schools and with the school system.

What methods describe the LEF leaders' brand of leadership?

Adaptive leadership

The executive director survey results suggested that LEF leadership could best be described by a collaborative model. The model described by Chrislip and Larson (1994, cited in Raphael and Anderson, 2001) suggests that the leader's primary focus is on the *process* of bringing together his or her constituents to solve problems.

This model can be enriched by applying the concept of "adaptive leadership," as described by Heifetz (1994). Unlike technical leadership, which involves solving routine problems, adaptive leadership confronts problems that demand learning and innovation from leaders. In adaptive leadership, "the leader is not at the forefront" but, rather, works to enlist the community in addressing its own problems. This type of leadership requires that the leader learn about the values held by his or her community and reveal conflicts between community values and the current reality in order to incite action.

> *"There was hardly anything going on in the community in terms of redevelopment efforts...[so] new and unique conversations and partnerships had to be created."*
>
> *-A longstanding LEF executive director*

The early LEFs emerged at a time when few were thinking about the community's role in improving public education. LEF founders had to build the case for public engagement in this arena. Early founders saw clearly that schools were in need of greater support. Nearly all shared the same broad goal: bridging the gap between schools and community. But rather than dictating a solution, the founders turned to their community for help. Most founders indicated that they did not know, initially, what specific objectives and activities should be undertaken to achieve their broad goal. But *even if they did know*, their predisposition to consensus suggests they would not act independently. These leaders would seek evidence that their agenda reflected community values and needs. They were truly committed to defining a mission that would be owned by their communities. To do so, they undertook some of the following activities:

- *Listening carefully to a range of community concerns.* The Portland Education Foundation founder's first activity was to ask 100 community leaders what they felt were the schools' major challenges and bring this information back to her board of directors. The founder observed that this activity also served to inform community members about the new LEF. Similarly, the founder of the Mon Valley Education Consortium picked up her telephone and began polling community members about their views on public education. The founder of the Public Education and Business Coalition in Denver, who conducted focus groups with community members soon after launching the LEF, said, "We had no original plan. We set the LEF up initially to listen and learn what can be done."

- *Asking school/district staff where they needed help.* Forward in the Fifth's first activity was to convene the superintendents of its multiple districts and ask them how the LEF could help them. The founder said she knew she would have to take action on whatever they discussed, as this would be the quickest, most effective way to establish a common agenda among so many people. Denver's founder brought business and central office leaders together to find out what skills local graduates lacked, and then the LEF designed a staff development program to address that

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need. Similarly, one of the first projects of the LEF in Charlotte was to provide professional development to increase the number of students in pre-algebra, a priority voiced by the superintendent at an LEF board meeting.

- *Rallying around existing issues.* Several founders described specific issues that shaped their initial mobilization efforts. Forward in the Fifth was created in response to a report that revealed the fifth congressional district in Kentucky was ranked last nationally for high school graduation by adults. The Mon Valley Education Consortium sprang up when drastic economic decline in the region threatened the resource base for schools. The Portland Education Foundation emerged in the early 1990s, when the bar for school performance was set high by the legislature, and funds for education were cut dramatically by a local property tax initiative.

In one form or another, most founders consulted a variety of stakeholders in the community to stimulate dialogue and elicit a baseline response to education issues. Heifetz says this strategy is essential to the success of adaptive work. Because communities are naturally composed of diverse values, it is critical for adaptive leaders to consider and weigh "competing value perspectives." This requires a leader who is open and fair, and as discussed above, many early founders reported being perceived this way by the community.

One issue not probed in the interviews with founders or in the executive director survey is how well LEF leaders include all sectors of their communities in their collaborative process. As a former LEF director said, "When I look back on our early organizing efforts, [I realize] we were organizing middle-class white parents. Now ... we recognize the need to reach the lower class in order to break the cycle of dropouts." Both the extent of community involvement (e.g., numbers of community members attending at meetings), and the representativeness of that involvement (e.g., presence of traditionally underrepresented groups), are issues that require further study.

Relationship-building

The concept of adaptive leadership is personified by a leader who mobilizes others to tackle difficult problems themselves rather than trying to get them to follow his or her vision. To accomplish this, founders demonstrated an almost extreme focus on building relationships. This activity in and of itself is valued by LEF leaders, past and current.

> *"An important strategy was to build friends.*
> *We said 'raising friends as a precursor to raising funds.'*
> *We tried to get peoples' souls involved as much as their pocketbooks."*
> *-A longstanding LEF executive director*

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LEF founders set their sights not merely on "fixing" the broken public education system in their communities, but on developing new relationships that could provide lasting success in the future. This involved extensive relationship-building. Every founder spoke at length about the importance of building a good collaborative relationship with their school districts and schools. Since this represents a core feature of the LEFs' mission, almost all of their early programs and activities could be viewed as relationship-building. Building close district relations while maintaining independence was an ever-present challenge for founders. To foster this relationship, founders emphasized the importance of appearing "non-threatening," with "good intentions," and open to "having an honest dialogue." In addition, the LEF itself developed new relationships: several LEF founders spoke proudly of how their board of directors brought together people who had never talked before, such as the presidents of the teachers' union and of local corporations.

The need to build good relations with the district and others was echoed in the executive director survey, in which almost 40 percent of respondents cited interpersonal/communication skills and relationship-building as the most important skills a director could possess. Executive directors also reported that out of eight possible activities, establishing and maintaining district relations was the one on which they spent the most time.

Building relationships is important within LEFs as well. Our interviews with founding directors suggest that many forged truly collaborative working relationships with board members. Additionally, 79 percent of current executive directors surveyed indicate that their board "challenges them in productive ways."

How did PEN facilitate LEF development?

While early LEFs faced numerous startup challenges, many were fortunate to receive financial support from the Public Education Fund (PEF). Through funding from Ford and other national foundations, PEF provided an initial seed grant to many early LEFs. These small grants enabled founders to leverage matching funds and expand their organizations.

After PEF's contribution to startups, PEN continued to assist LEFs by making available large grants (e.g., Library Power) that benefited them in many ways.[8] First, the grants helped LEFs gain authority, including the attention of central office administrators. One founder said that she literally met the new superintendent with a $1.2 million Library Power grant in her pocket. Another director indicated that the Library Power grant, particularly the activities it involved, helped her LEF gain a higher profile in the community. To this day, her LEF is considered the authority on libraries. Second, large PEN grants were a major force in developing the LEF's ability

[8] These large grants did not start until the early 1990s, well after the LEF movement began.

to move toward more systemic approaches to education reform. While many founders acknowledged an early desire to move toward systemic change, they often cited PEN grants as the catalyst in actually carrying out such change. Through PEN grants, LEFs provided funds to schools, but with those funds came requirements (opportunities or obligations, depending on initial buy-in) to participate in training, collaborative initiatives, data collection, and other activities to support educational change.

> *"We realized the need to have a board that was powerful and that could buffer the Fund from the slings and arrows of righteous political fortune."*
>
> *-A former LEF executive director*

Finally, PEF and PEN leaders such as David Bergholz, Gerri Kay and later, Wendy Puriefoy provided many founders with advice and technical assistance. These individuals were critical to developing the missions and programs of some LEFs. Furthermore, due in large part to guidance from PEF/PEN, most of the early LEF founders worked with boards of directors that included high-powered corporate and political decisionmakers. These "power" boards provided not only financial resources and valuable expertise, but also access to other important community members including funders and district officials. Moreover, board members' status in the community gave LEFs the credibility and legitimacy needed to carry out their work. The executive director survey findings reveal that LEF directors do talk to other LEF directors and to PEN, presumably for networking purposes. However, it may be useful to collect information from directors about the range of activities that could be encouraged by PEN to assist LEFs.

Implications of Themes for the Study of LEF Leadership

The environment in which LEF leadership emerges

The research conducted on leadership to date — the literature review, the survey of current executive directors, and the interviews with early founders — has focused on the tasks that LEF leaders undertake — their roles, responsibilities, successes, and challenges. It is our belief that leadership must be defined as a function of these actions, including the local and national context in which these activities take place. If we accept that LEF leaders are adaptive and collaborative, then features and shifts in the local, state, and national context will play a critical role in defining the work of LEF leaders. The way that an LEF adapts to its surrounding context, and vice versa, will form the fabric of LEF leadership.

A next step in thinking about LEF leadership would be to define the environment in which these and other leadership themes play out. Figure I, on the next page, is a preliminary attempt to capture this environment in a visual model.

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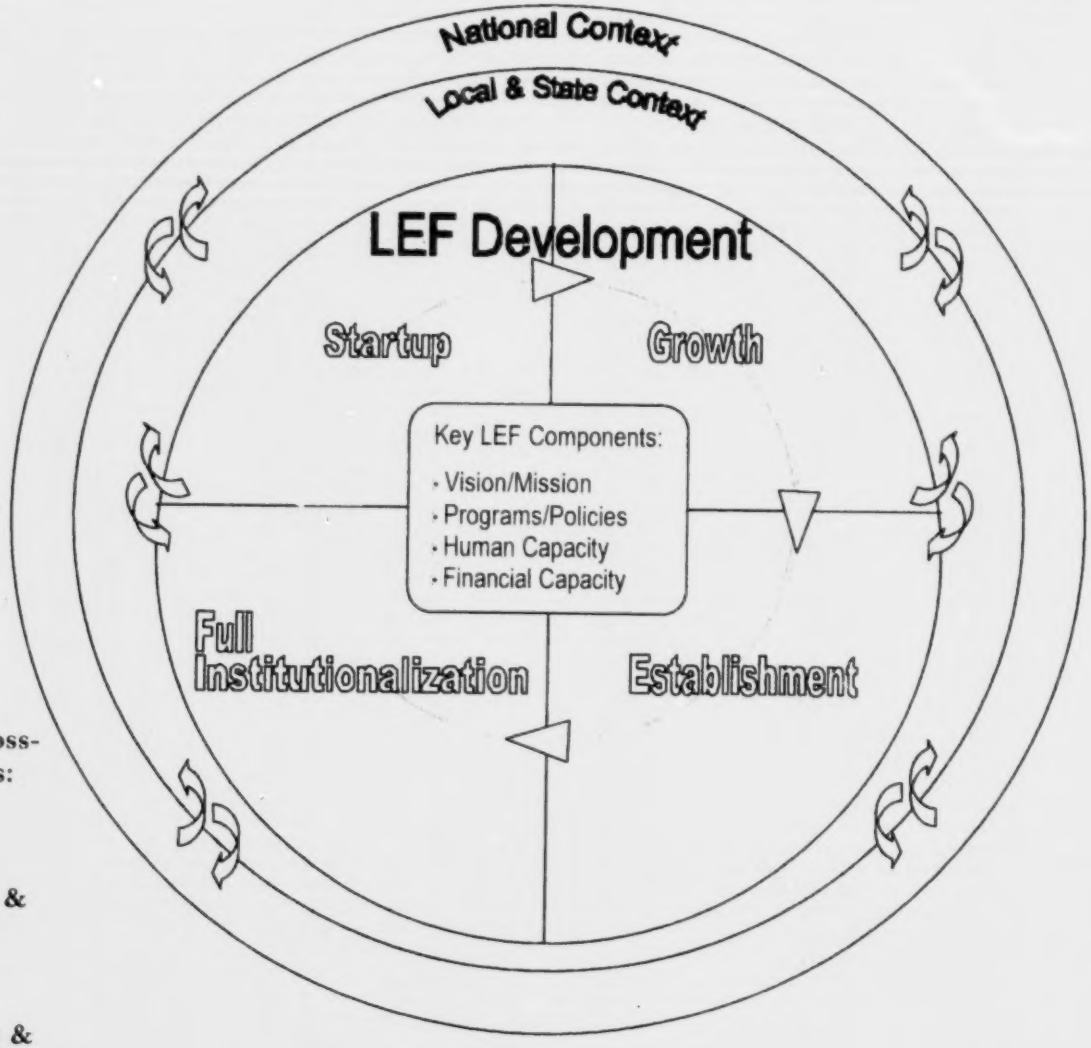
Figure I: The environment in which LEF leadership emerges



Preliminary Cross-cutting Themes:

- **Adaptive Leadership**
- **Collaboration & Relationship-Building**
- **Inclusiveness**
- **Opportunities & Obstacles**

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As discussed, leadership is found in the workings of an LEF. Thus, the central circle in this model describes four traditional developmental stages of an organization: startup, growth, establishment, and full institutionalization. Any study of LEFs, no matter what the focus, ought to take into account the stage of organizational development of its subjects. (Note we do not include "unsuccessful" stages, such as "decline,"[9] but have focused on an ideal LEF life cycle.) Within each of the stages, we have identified four key LEF components that are influenced by LEF leadership: vision/mission, programs/policies, human capacity (e.g., director, staff), and financial capacity.

These components will vary depending on factors such as the stage in which the LEF operates. For example, an LEF in the startup stage would likely be focusing much energy on the definition of its mission. It may be managing only one or two projects, such as a teacher minigrant program or a community dialogue to implement its mission. Human and financial resources would be limited. An LEF in the established stage will likely have a larger number of programs and policies, possibly with more emphasis on systemic reform and full community engagement. Staff will have been hired, the board of directors will have a different role than in startup, and financial resources probably will have increased.

Furthermore, the key components interact with each other. For example, as discussed in this report, financial and staffing constraints have had a major impact on the scope of LEF efforts. Many LEF directors struggle to identify consistent funding sources that will allow them to spend their time on programmatic and policy work. In response to an executive director survey item, one director wrote: "I am the only staff. This limits the number and type of projects our LEF can take on." It is important to document the challenges to LEFs and their leaders, particularly now, when the funding environment is so highly competitive.

Each LEF operates in a complex environment that is uniquely determined by not only the inner circle of the model, but the LEF's interactions with its local, state, and national contexts, represented by the two outer circles. These interactions work in both directions, by which we mean local, state, and national influences affect, and are affected by, the LEF's outputs and outcomes. (Similarly, local and state contexts are affected by and affect each other.) Interviews with founders revealed many instances where the passage of local or state laws became the impetus for LEF action. Of course such action may not have been possible, had the LEF not: created a space for collaborative work; built relationships between the schools and the community; demonstrated a willingness to work within the local context; and responded favorably to opportunities and obstacles along the way. Likewise, LEF actions have changed

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[9] See the Summary of Presentations (1999). *NEA EXPLORE: Reassessment of Support for Arts Organizations – Life Cycles and Critical Junctures of Organizations.*
http://arts.endow.gov/explore/Colloquia/lifecycles.html

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the local context. Interviews with founders provided many examples: reform initiatives in schools, passage of bonds, community actions to keep teachers on the payroll, and other advocacy efforts.

How can we begin to explain the influence of LEF leadership in this environment? The research described in this report leads to a variety of themes, four of which are predominant across a range of LEF leadership experiences. Described below, these four themes fit under the overall theme of *creating a space for sustained collaborative leadership*:

1. *Adaptive leadership.* Consistently, LEF leadership is described as a collaborative effort to develop a shared agenda unique to the local community. Leadership is predicated on learning, building consensus, and responding creatively to the context in which work is undertaken. As we have seen, LEF agenda items can come as a result of internal reflection within the community (e.g., dialogue among community members) and of external events that impinge upon the community (e.g., community response to legislative action). The ebb and flow between internal and external forces tells the crucial story of organizational adaptability, a key to understanding LEF leadership.

2. *Collaboration and relationship-building.* LEF leadership also focuses heavily on collaboration and relationship building. Because these organizations are intended to serve a permanent role in their communities, LEF leaders seek to develop high-quality connections between different sectors of the community, particularly the schools and the community in which they reside. Some LEF founders even implied that these relationships were the most important contribution LEFs make to school reform.

3. *Inclusiveness of LEF leadership, governance, and community-building.* Studying leadership prompts questions about the racial and class representativeness of LEF leaders, including LEF boards of directors. As mentioned the executive director survey findings reveal a disparity between characteristics of LEF leaders and the communities they serve. Furthermore, inclusiveness is also an issue when LEFs claim to be engaging "the community." Which community sectors are included? Which are left out? These important questions relate to the community-building mission of all LEFs.

4. *Opportunities and obstacles.* Organizations need opportunities to make positive change in their communities. LEF leadership, characterized by flexibility and collaboration, serves to guide the complex interactions between the LEF and its context that provide these opportunities. Some opportunities lie waiting to be found; others are forged through joint efforts. In any case, they are seized and become the foundation for future endeavors. Obstacles, too, can be created or

simply encountered. A true test of leadership is how an organization deals with serious challenges.

These four preliminary cross-cutting themes describe how LEF leadership interacts with the local, state, and national contexts in which the LEF operates. For example, using adaptive leadership, the LEF reaches out to engage community stakeholders in dialogue about how to improve schools. Because LEF leaders tend to be focused on creating a *sustained* collaborative forum, this outreach tends to be ongoing, contributing to the development of a lasting relationship. The inclusiveness of the LEF's outreach efforts could be a useful yardstick for measuring the LEF leadership's commitment to school equity and other issues. Opportunities may arise, such as a grant opportunity from a national foundation, of which LEF leaders could be ready to take advantage.

As yet, we don't know if the cross-cutting themes are independent of the developmental stage of the LEF.[10] However, it is easy to imagine charting their influence across various developmental stages of a longstanding LEF. For example, an LEF may be founded by a board that does not adequately represent the community it serves. Over time, this issue may become an obstacle to key LEF programs and policies that serve the goal of full community engagement in school reform. Such a challenge may be addressed by an executive director, who could institute a new selection process for board members. Another example concerns financial capacity. The LEF leadership model embraces relationship-building. In many cases these relationships result in increased financial capacity for the LEF. However, as funding opportunities shrink nationally and locally, new types of relationships will have to be forged to gain secure funding.

Suggestions for future research

The complex contexts in which LEF leadership functions, as represented in Figure I, present a rich area for study. As described in this report, many LEFs have undergone shifts in their scope: from extremely supportive of a district to more critical; from school-based to more systemic, district-wide education reform; and from programming to policymaking/information dissemination efforts. The reasons for these shifts are not easily apparent. Some shifts represent local idiosyncratic responses to the education system within a community. Other shifts are likely to be responses to the passage of "No Child Left Behind" and the changing national environment of particularly heightened educational accountability. Still others may be the result of unexpected opportunities that LEFs — by creating a space for sustained collaboration — are poised to seize.

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[10] Further research is needed to determine whether and how the themes vary by developmental stage.

Yet amidst these variations nearly all LEF activities stem from leadership provided by the executive director, key staff, and the board of directors. In-depth exploration of LEF leadership will illustrate what is special, and important, about the LEF "brand" of leadership. Already we have clues. Stepping back a little from this research, certain values emerge. Leaders appear to exhibit:

- a concern for social justice and equity;
- an emphasis on honesty and objectivity as a tool for improvement;
- a commitment to collaboration, relationship-building, and shared leadership;
- personal investment;
- innovation;
- a willingness to take risks.

A better grasp of these values will enrich PEN's understanding of LEF leadership and underscore its contribution to education and community building. Given that PEN/PEF has played an important role in supporting LEFs, it is natural that the organization will want to identify patterns in LEF growth to guide future organizational development efforts.

To explore these issues across a wide variety of communities, a qualitative research method that utilizes rich narrative description should be employed. The story of a founder's experience, told through her own and her community's perspective, can be the source of an in-depth examination of the complex nature of LEF leadership. Because each story is so different, a case-study approach seems most appropriate. It will allow researchers to describe varied contexts and situations and ultimately discern crucial themes that more fully describe the work of LEFs in school reform. A good first step, then, might be to conduct a small number of initial case studies, starting, perhaps, with the early founders because preliminary research has already yielded useful themes to pursue.

This deep-level analysis of one group of LEF leaders ought to be accompanied simultaneously by a more comprehensive data collection activity. For example, a followup to the first Urban Institute survey of executive directors could be administered. The purpose of a survey of directors would *not* be to gather in-depth information about leadership — for which case studies and interviews are better methods — but to assess several issues.

First, the followup survey could help determine whether the themes being explored in the initial case studies resonate with current directors. Second, the followup survey could be used to define cohorts of interest for future case studies, such as "next generation" leaders or leaders of color. For example, in our interviews with founders, two former directors talked about how their LEFs were challenged to remain as productive once they left the organization. Documentation about how many current directors have faced the challenge of being a successor (or leaving and passing this on

to the next director) could help PEN decide on priorities for its research. Third, the followup survey could gather more detailed information about general findings from the first executive director survey, such as what LEF directors meant when they said they needed more time for "strategic planning." Fourth, a broad data collection activity would help PEN understand those examples of LEF leadership that do not fit the norm, particularly if these examples fail. The examples could be studied through small-scale data collection activities, such as telephone interviews with leaders who have left LEFs. Finally, collecting data from all PEN directors may offset executive directors' concerns we heard about PEN's apparent tendency to focus attention on a core group of longstanding directors.

With the development of its theory of action, PEN has embarked on a important path: the creation of a working theory of LEFs as unique intermediary organizations. The literature on organizational change can contribute much to this inquiry. The research on education reform, too — particularly the emerging role of intermediary organizations — has influenced and been influenced by LEFs. Perhaps most relevant, for "small organizations with big missions," organizational challenges will be paramount. Results from a well-planned research agenda could guide PEN's future organizational development efforts as well as contribute to the literature on school improvement.

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Appendix A: Founding Director Interview Summaries

Charlotte Advocates for Education
Charlotte, North Carolina

Charlotte Advocates for Education (CAE) was conceived by local business leaders in the early 1990s to support a nationally recognized education reformer just hired as the new district superintendent. A power company president led efforts to convene a board of directors which recruited Corinne Allen for executive director. Although she knew little about school reform at the time, Allen had been director of a non-profit and had significant community leadership experience. She also had the advantage of learning about the Public Education Network during one of Wendy Puriefoy's visits to the area to speak about local education funds. Puriefoy provided direction and guidance to Allen and was critical to the development of the CAE.

While CAE started with programs that supported the district, such as teacher minigrants and programs suggested by the district superintendent, it quickly transformed itself into a more independent agent of reform. Within several years, in response to a vote altering how the school board is elected, CAE embarked on a large-scale study to learn what the community knew about school governance and the potential effects of this change. Working with a research consultant, the LEF surveyed the public and conducted focus groups as part of its community assessment. Less than fifteen percent of the community even knew a change had been made that would affect the next school board election and few understood the critical role the school board played in school decisions. The results of this study led CAE to undertake a massive public relations campaign, "Make Your Mark on the Board," to educate and enable voters to make informed decisions. As part of this campaign, the Fund ran television, radio, and newspaper advertisements, held seven town meetings, distributed over 50,000 brochures, and tacked posters throughout the community. It also provided professional development training to newly elected school board members. Throughout this project, CAE's role was simply to provide information without advocating any particular position.

Information turned out to be "a powerful tool" for this LEF. Just when the organization had been "nibbling at the edges" of school reform, another event thrust CAE into the center. When a school bond was surprisingly rejected by voters, Allen used the community assessment to determine what had happened. CAE learned that the public did not believe the school board was using existing funds effectively. Allen approached the district with this information and suggested that CAE bring in experts to independently review district spending practices. This team ultimately found the community's suspicions of the district to be unfounded and disseminated these findings to the community. In this way the LEF secured its reputation as an objective reporter of needed information. Moreover, it enabled the district to get the bond passed. Allen points to this, and increased voter turnout, as evidence of the LEF's success.

Through these projects, CEA also has expanded its role as "critical friend" of the district. For instance, the LEF conducted training workshops to inform school board

candidates of their responsibilities and periodically assessed and publicized public opinion on the quality of the school board's work. More importantly, the LEF's role as a key player in local education issues allowed it to foster good relations with the subsequent superintendent, according to Allen.

Allen believes having a recognized board composed of civic and corporate leaders is critical to the LEF's longevity. She credits the board with giving credibility to the LEF and enabling it to grow quickly, with adequate funding. When Allen left the organization three years ago, she left the board with the difficult task of replacing her.

Forward in the Fifth
Berea, Kentucky

In the mid-1980s, U.S. News and World Report revealed that Kentucky's fifth congressional district ranked last in the nation for percentage of adults with high school diplomas. In reaction to this report, Earle Wallace, a native of the fifth district, commissioned the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) to investigate the condition of education in the region. MACED recommended the creation of an umbrella organization to work to improve the educational attainment of citizens of the fifth district. In 1986, by providing funds and supplying its own staff members, MACED gave birth to Forward in the Fifth (FIF). Initially, the Fund was led by its board chair on a volunteer basis. In 1991, Ginny Eager, a MACED employee, was hired as a paid executive director.

From the outset, FIF served school districts in twenty-seven counties. (It currently serves 59 districts.) The sheer size and geographical spread of the organization's territory presented challenges for maintaining close contact with all of the districts and schools. To address this issue, FIF created local affiliate branches to carry out its work locally. The Fund organized a meeting with all district superintendents early on at which Eager presented FIF as an ally in hopes of gaining trust and support from these districts. When superintendents expressed the need to increase student attendance, the Fund paid attention and launched an attendance incentive program, with cash prizes for schools and a parent outreach program. Eager said it was important for the LEF's future to take action on whatever need the superintendents discussed at that first meeting. "We were willing to do anything that showed them our value," she said.

Throughout its duration, FIF has maintained its role as an independent support for schools. In addition to the attendance program, FIF adopted the minigrant model and initiated a field trip program that the districts could not afford. Like many LEFs, FIF received a Library Power grant, which helped them gain a much higher profile in the community. Eager claims the Fund is "still considered the foremost authority on libraries" because of this grant. When asked to speculate on the reasons for her organization's longevity, Eager explains that the schools were simply "very needy."

A pivotal point for FIF came in 1990 through the enactment of the Kentucky Education Reform Act, a statewide school reform law. Because schools were consumed with the changes required by this law, FIF shifted its focus to assist them with the reform. For example, as schools began to implement site-based management, FIF provided training on group skills for counsel members. The LEF also held informational forums for the public explaining the law and its consequences.

About five years into its development, Eager and her staff realized they needed to use more effective organizing skills. It took advantage of an opportunity to participate in three years of community organizing training through a southern grassroots leadership development initiative. Although the training was useful for local affiliates,

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Eager and her staff soon realized the training would be even more valuable to low-income parents to "break the cycle" of school dropouts. Thus FIF has begun to target low-income families with parent training workshops.

The LEF is also trying to affect a cultural change to improve the educational attainment level in the region. Eager explains that Appalachia is an isolated region, with few opportunities to learn about other cultures. To address this issue, and begin to break down the rigidly institutionalized racism in the region, FIF is developing a program to enable teachers to travel to other states and countries.

Lincoln Public School Foundation
Lincoln, Nebraska

The Lincoln Public School Foundation (LPSF), founded in 1989, works with a school system that has won national awards for its academic outcomes. Barbara Bartle, the executive director, sees LPSF's role as a stimulus, reminding the public about the value of education and preventing complacency from setting in.

LPSF was modeled after a successful foundation at the University of Nebraska. Its initial goals were to solicit funds from alumni and conduct campaigns to create endowed funds. The then-superintendent and the school board organized a steering committee that led to LPSF's founding, helped in part by a large gift from a former teacher. In addition, an outstanding educator and community leader helped to lay the groundwork for the fledgling organization.

When Bartle came on as executive director, the initial founders' gift campaign was nearing completion. To help move LPSF to the next phase, she asked a former president of the University of Nebraska, and of its foundation, to serve on the board. He jump started the LEF's development efforts and gave the already strong board even more expertise. Bartle also sought to broaden the LEF's vision beyond fundraising, which led her to PEN. A year later, LPSF joined, and each year thereafter the scope of the organization has widened.

Indeed, Library Power and the Comprehensive School Health Grant, both large initiatives fostered by PEN, gave LPSF an identity beyond fundraising, which had been the organization's primary focus for five years. These initiatives were structured around an emphasis on community involvement and included valuable training and technical assistance. In addition, at about this time, the board learned that 75 percent of the community did not have children in public schools. This surprising news, and the new efforts in the large PEN initiatives, challenged Bartle and the board to think harder about how to better engage the public in education. The LEF's first independent step in this direction was to conduct a study with Gallup on the community's challenges and priorities for the school system. The results of that study continue to shape LPSF's efforts. In addition, the LEF is working with a communications consultant to strengthen its public dissemination efforts.

Tensions emerged as the LEF began moving from not only serving as a fundraiser but also to promoting public engagement around educational issues. The LEF board and the school board of education are working together to develop strong communication lines as this new relationship is being forged. LPSF's development is worth watching carefully to see whether and how an LEF — and particularly a high-functioning LEF — can make this transition. Bartle's leadership style may help: she works best "behind the scenes," showcasing the role of her board rather than drawing attention to herself — and indeed, she genuinely thinks the board has been

key to LPSF's success. It is likely that her style, and the LEF's financial stability, will enable it to withstand the challenges ahead.

Los Angeles Educational Partnership
Los Angeles, California

Like cities on the east coast in 1982, Los Angeles had many overcrowded, underfunded schools, struggling to deal with an influx of immigrant students with multiple languages, as well as public frustration with court-ordered bussing. Peggy Funkhouser and others, many affiliated with CORO, a leadership training program, began to think about applying a neighborhood redevelopment model to public education. These discussions led to the formation of the Los Angeles Education Partnership (LAEP), with a fifteen-member board of directors comprised of corporate and foundation leaders and Peggy Funkhouser at the helm.

Funding came fairly easy to the new LEF. The California Roundtable had helped to pass the first State school reform legislation in 1983. David Bergholz and PEF provided a $200,000 incentive match and Los Angeles corporations made a contribution. In addition, while speaking in foundation circles, Bergholz suggested that national foundations, such as Rockefeller and Carnegie, explore what was happening in Los Angeles. Because of this early interest and large multiyear grants, LAEP at first "had more money than it could spend wisely."

This LEF had other advantages: links to a leadership network, a small but strong corporate leadership base, the then-superintendent's desire for outside help to assist the district in improving schools, and his open-door policy with the LEF. More importantly, the superintendent understood how important it was that the new organization be independent of the district. For this reason, he didn't seek to put district representatives on the LEF board.

Still, with the problems of education in a city as large, complex, and challenged as Los Angeles, LAEP had to negotiate its role with care. Though committed to helping the district address the significant challenges it faced, the board was careful in the beginning to make sure LAEP was not perceived as a "mouthpiece" for the district. Also, because of the size of the Los Angeles district, the board took time to determine the most strategic use of their limited funds to assure effectiveness. In its early years, with the superintendent's blessing, the LEF built its credibility on effective work with networks of teachers and schools. The Partnership saw its role as investing its "venture capital" in research and development of effective reform strategies and as a "hothouse for innovation." Later, with larger grants, the board made scaling up a priority and focused on extending the LEF's proven programs to other school sites. The adequacy of funding led LAEP to address more issues than it originally intended. Eventually, the multifaceted work provided experience across many issues and led to a more comprehensive school-based approach, which resulted in a grant from the New American Schools for the Urban Learning Centers design.

An engaged and highly competent board of directors gave Funkhouser the support she needed to raise funds and to communicate to the city's leadership that education

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is an important issue for everyone. She judges the success of LAEP by the community's increased engagement in educational issues; the expanded media coverage of education, from nonexistent to frequent front page and evening news status; and the greater number of people who now to have productive dialogues with educators.

Mon Valley Education Consortium
McKeesport, Pennsylvania

As a result of declines in the steel industry, the Mon Valley region in southwestern Pennsylvania suffered devastating job losses between 1975 and 1985. The region lost half its population, and its public schools suffered a dramatic decline in resources. It was in this context that David Bergholz met Linda Croushore. A former teacher and principal in the McKeesport School District, Croushore was passionate about public school reform and expressed a strong desire to do something for public schools in her community. Through the Public Education Fund (PEF), Bergholz provided her with $5,000 in startup funds that she leveraged to $36,000, the first budget for the McKeesport Public Education Fund.

Working alone and on a voluntary basis, Croushore borrowed a telephone and began calling around the community to learn what people had to say about public education. She convened a board, which she ensured was demographically representative of the community, and met to discuss what the organization could do.

From the beginning, Croushore and the board thought "forward" to the organization's legacy. They envisioned the LEF helping communities place public education in "a premier place of importance" by focusing on children as the future of the economy. To reach this goal, the organizers decided the Fund needed to carry out a public information and community engagement agenda. For instance, like most fledgling LEFs, the McKeesport fund adopted the teacher minigrant program. However, Croushore added a unique twist: by requiring that grant recipients gain publicity for their awards, through newspapers or radio spots, the minigrant program also functioned as a "hook" to engage the community in conversations about education issues.

Because of the minigrant program's popularity, less than two years after its inception the LEF was approached by nineteen other local school districts eager to join. The LEF incorporated these districts and renamed itself the Mon Valley Education Consortium (MVEC). Croushore is proud of the relations they have maintained with the majority of these districts, admitting it is a challenge to keep up with the constant changes in leadership across the now 25 districts.

According to Croushore, MVEC saw its role as being an advocate for public education. She and her board believed that building capacity in schools and communities would lead naturally to school improvement. For example, early in its development, MVEC took advantage of a unique opportunity to affect school climate. The LEF responded to a state-issued RFP for a lead teacher initiative. While the initiative was intended to pull select teachers out of schools to train them to become leaders, Croushore says this approach did not align with how she and others conceptualized leadership training. Thus, instead, MVEC designed school renewal teams made up of teachers selected by their own peers. The teams were granted the

responsibility to determine which issues in the school were key and to develop ways to address them. Their philosophy, according to Croushore, was "if you create the right culture in schools, leadership will emerge." By abandoning the top-down approach, and viewing all teachers as potential leaders, the program produced a core of committed people who felt truly engaged in school improvement.

Although MVEC was conceived with funding from the Ford Foundation, Croushore acknowledged that gaining funding beyond the seed money was difficult because of a dearth of local foundations in the Mon Valley region. Fortunately, with the help of Bergholz and others, Croushore was able to convince foundations in nearby Pittsburgh that its redevelopment depended on the success of the Mon Valley region. These foundations continue to be an important source of support, financial and otherwise, for the LEF today. In addition, through its own efforts, MVEC has been able to build a small endowment.

Nashville Public Education Foundation
Nashville, Tennessee

By the mid-1980s, after two tumultuous decades of desegregation court orders, public confidence in the Nashville public schools had waned substantially. In 1987, a school board member and well-known member of the community, Annette Eskind, donated $1 million to found the Nashville Public Education Foundation (NPEF) as a way to rejuvenate public support for the school system. The LEF was modeled after the vision supported by the Ford Foundation, with teacher minigrants a centerpiece of the initial work and a strong board of directors representing key decisionmakers from the community.

After a year of running the organization with volunteers, Eskind, as board chair, hired Debby Gould to be NPEF's first executive director. While Gould did not have any education experience, she had worked in nonprofits and possessed a good understanding of the community. Gould's primary responsibilities included overseeing the mini-grant program and grant writing, while Eskind continued to build relationships and establish the LEF's credibility.

From its inception, NPEF functioned as a support for a district troubled by sometimes irrational court orders. The LEF never took on a project without initial district buy-in. Gould describes the LEF's purpose as "filling in niches" for the district by identifying needs and providing the expertise and resources to address those needs. Trends in teacher requests for minigrants helped NPEF recognize teachers' needs; next, NPEF realized that principals could also benefit from minigrants to address schoolwide efforts to increase parental involvement. Gould also initiated several innovative programs, including one in which a local radio station advertised the district's need for musical instrument donations for its schools.

When in 1990 NPEF received a $1.2 million Library Power grant, the organization was able to foster more systemic, districtwide change. NPEF promoted collaborative teaching practices, introduced the concept of self-guided student learning, and ultimately led the district to adopt best practices. Equally important, the grant had a significant effect on the LEF's growth. Soon it was pushing the district to take responsibility for sustaining new programs. For example, a decade after creating and publishing a booklet entitled "Now I'm Five," instructing parents in how to prepare their children for kindergarten, NPEF passed this on to the district. Gould continues to emphasize NPEF's role as "a catalyst," with NPEF's relationship with the school system becoming increasingly systemic. Currently, for example, the LEF directs a Principal Leadership Academy, with support from Peabody College of Vanderbilt University.

In addition to building a relationship with the school district, NPEF has had to negotiate its role in relation to other nonprofit organizations in the community. Gould says the LEF has always collaborated with other organizations in projects, and

that part of this collaboration involves delineating each group's particular role, not only to avoid stepping on toes, but to maximize efficiency. NPEF, for instance, has determined not to send volunteers directly into schools because another organization in the community has taken on this role.

Paterson Education Foundation Inc.
Paterson, New Jersey

The Paterson Education Foundation (PEF) was established in 1983 in the first round of grants from the Ford Foundation. Irene Sterling served as executive director for the first three and a half years, then left for other ventures. But the two executive directors to succeed her had difficulties and by 1990 the LEF was suffering severe financial problems. At the same time, the state had begun monitoring the Paterson school district, a first step toward state takeover. The LEF board of directors was deadlocked on whether to support or oppose state operation. It asked Sterling to come back and help determine PEF's role in this new, stressful political environment. "This was a turning point," says Sterling. Although she had been advised in the past to keep the LEF out of the political arena, the organization had to take a stand or it would have no voice — and no role to play.

When the state subsequently took over the Paterson school district, Sterling focused on how the LEF could support the eventual return to local control. "Within a year of the takeover, PEF started asking what had led to takeover, and what could be learned to make sure it doesn't happen again," she explained. Although many of the original board members left, Sterling found new, younger replacements who were willing to support the schools as they moved through this takeover. Now, she is proud of the fact that her organization is the only community-based organization that the state commissioner consulted to describe the status of state control of the district.

At the time of the takeover, Sterling began supplying data to counteract the political hearsay that had always drifted around the schools. With a board election coming up, the LEF saw the opportunity to inform the public about the board's function and how to run as a candidate. Without taking a position on a specific candidate, PEF also provided information on specific candidates who ran.

Years later, Sterling is still working with the community. She has tried to help Paterson residents see not only that the schools needed to improve, but also that they had to participate to make it happen. "We sought to change policy first by changing community values and attitudes," she says. For instance, a series of conversations about race and education were held involving over 150 people, including parents, community agency staff, business leaders, and others not previously involved in education. "We gave people a chance to hear and be heard," says Sterling. From these talks she wrote up a community agenda in 1999, for which she told the community that it needed to take responsibility.

Sterling judges the success of PEF by the fact that it is the only organization in Paterson that "has something to say about education." More importantly, it is viewed by the community as a key player. Her staff and board have been recruited to perform statewide work on the Abbott reforms in New Jersey and have been asked to train other communities in their work.

Sterling suggests to a number of characteristics that make her an effective leader for a troubled organization in a troubled school district. She says she is "a good translator of other people's language" and that she can effectively communicate with diverse groups of people. She also has an "imagination," meaning she envisions how schools and communities can be different, and she recognizes that changing schools is deeply intertwined with changing communities.

Portland Schools Foundation
Portland, Oregon

The Portland Schools Foundation (PSF), established in 1992, a decade after the LEF movement began, was founded by community members concerned about education funding when a property tax limitation was voted in. At about the same time, the state passed major education reform legislation calling for higher student performance. Realizing the public schools needed a "strong organized community voice" to advocate for them, the district superintendent and a parent leader convened a group of key players in the community to create a grassroots independent school advocacy organization.

After a year of organizational meetings, the board of directors hired Cynthia Guyer, a member of the board, as executive director. As a parent of a child in the public school system, Guyer became interested in the establishment of this organization. She had a strong background in philanthropy that included experience as a board chair and a director of development in several nonprofit organizations. The LEF began with a budget of $25,000.

Upon the recommendation of her board, Guyer began learning about the major challenges facing public schools through interviews with 100 public opinion leaders. This strategy allowed her to better understand the pressing education issues in the community and to announce to critical community members the creation of her organization.

Through this exercise it became clear that school funding was the most pressing issue, and that grantmaking would be futile given that the district was facing a $30 million cut that year. Thus, the board determined PSF's first action would have to attempt to make a large impact on this issue. Despite prudent warnings from some community members, Guyer and the board began two major campaigns: one, to raise money to buy back teachers laid off by the cuts; and two, to publicly demonstrate for stable funding for schools through a march. Both campaigns were successful. In only eight weeks they raised $11 million to buy back teachers, and 30,000 people participated in the march. This "really rattled cages of state legislature," says Guyer. Out of this event, Guyer was able to work directly with the mayor to build a statewide public education lobbying organization, the Coalition for School Funding Now, to advocate for stable and adequate funding for schools.

While PSF mobilized immediately around political issues, it began to implement other types of programs after Guyer discovered the Public Education Network. By acquiring new ideas through the network, Guyer developed two major initiatives: a comprehensive school reform grant program and a parent and community involvement grant. The superintendent strongly supported both of these programs.

Although relations with the school district remained good throughout the first few years, after the founding superintendent left, PSF faced greater challenges. The superintendent's successor lasted only a short time and the school board has been

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unable to find a replacement for two years. The LEF has tried numerous strategies to foster good relations with the district, including making its work "transparent" to appear less threatening, but thus far nothing has proved successful.

Because Portland has few local foundations, Guyer has been forced to seek support from national funders. However, national foundations have been hesitant to fund the LEF because of the lack of "strong, bold district leadership." Guyer has tried to convince funders that greater financial support would strengthen the LEF to push for this type of district leadership, but so far no major funder has made that investment.

Public Education and Business Coalition
Denver, Colorado

In 1983 Susan Zimmermann and her law partner Gail Klapper started a part-time project to bridge the gap between public schools and the private sector in Denver, Colorado. Like other urban centers in the early 1980s, Denver suffered from school desegregation, increasing segregation between city and suburbs, and a growing gap between rich and poor. Zimmermann and Klapper believed the business community had a role to play in schools. To define this role better, with a small grant from a nonprofit organization, they brought together a wide range of stakeholders — school superintendents, business people, teachers, community leaders — to discuss the issues and determine what could be done. The Public Education and Business Coalition (PEBC) grew out of these early conversations. From the outset, it was a multi-district endeavor that included Denver and several suburban school districts.

For the first couple of years, Zimmermann and Klapper provided approximately 20 hours a week pro bono to get the organization off the ground. In 1985, they were approached by David Bergholz and Gerri Kay, who helped them secure a grant from the Ford Foundation to support the work of PEBC. With that grant, the women were able to dissolve their law firm. Zimmermann became the executive director of PEBC, while Klapper remained active on the board of directors. The LEF attracted grants from local foundations and corporations and created a strong board of directors that included business leaders, school superintendents, the head of the teacher's union, and community representatives.

Over the years, PEBC began to expand its funding base through the provision of staff development services on a fee-for-service basis. (Initially, these services were underwritten with grants, but could only be sustained by creating a fee-for-services model.) Business leaders and educators together identified areas to target for assistance. Improved writing instruction was the first area selected. PEBC responded by bringing in well-known experts from universities around the country to provide workshops and then brought on local experts to provide long-term staff development support to teachers in their classrooms. With limited funds, the LEF began by serving small numbers of teachers, and only those who wanted the training and made a commitment to attend workshops, work with a staff developer in their classroom, and participate in debriefing sessions. The early selectivity actually made the programs seem more like a privilege to teachers, and demand rose. In time, the LEF focused more broadly on literacy instruction as a tool to improve students' writing and reading comprehension abilities. Math and science staff development models were added later.

Zimmermann's willingness to call up national experts asking for advice, and somehow persuading them to contribute to the PEBC's efforts, is part of what made her a pioneering leader. Ultimately, this direct service work helped to sustain PEBC

over the years. Zimmermann thinks that all LEF directors should look at how to create a diversified funding base and not rely too heavily on foundation grants.

PEBC did not focus solely on schools, however. The board recognized that systemic change in education had to come both from the bottom up — in programs targeted to schools and classrooms — and from the top down. To that end, PEBC also worked with the districts' central offices. In one example, the LEF helped the districts deal with public criticism about their organizational structure by bringing in experts from local corporations to conduct management and efficiency studies. These studies produced constructive feedback about ways to make district operations more cost effective and built valuable relationships between the business volunteers and educators.

Zimmerman was at PEBC from 1983 to 1993. Her work there put her on a new career path as an education consultant and nonfiction writer.

Washington Parent Group Fund
Washington, DC

The Washington Parent Group Fund (WPGF) is one of the few LEFs that preceded grants from the Ford Foundation. Unlike other LEFs, WPGF's purpose was specifically to empower parents by providing them with the resources, training, and voice to advocate for their children in public schools. As such the LEF worked directly with parents at partner schools in Washington, DC.

Joy Majied became involved with WPGF as a parent of a child with disabilities in a public school that partnered with WPGF. First a parent representative to the LEF, Majied became staff a year later, and by the second year was hired as the LEF's executive director. Having learned to advocate on behalf of parents for her disabled son, Majied believes she was well-suited to train other parents to be activists.

Under Majied's leadership, WPGF initiated several programs including a parent training institute and a training model workbook to provide parents with the skills needed to work effectively with schools and teachers. Parents not only benefited from WPGF's work, they were active participants in it. Working directly with school staff, administration, and other parents, they developed projects to improve learning opportunities for students and foster good relationships between home and school.

The LEF shared terrain with an advocacy organization, Parents United, that, unlike WPGF, addressed citywide education issues. The two groups differed dramatically in their agendas: WPGF served a supportive capacity-building function for parents and schools, while the advocacy group advocated for change at a higher level, often by aggressively confronting the district with lawsuits. Unfortunately, parents were not always clear on the details of legal cases in which Parents United involved them, and some of the fallout from their confusion adversely affected WPGF's reputation. Furthermore, while WPGF's leadership was mostly African American, the leadership of Parents United was mostly white, and this difference divided community members.

District support came fairly easily for WPGF. Majied attributes this to the LEF's non-threatening, bottom-up approach and to her ability to present herself as "fair." Gaining the trust of the district allowed Majied access to policy people inside the system. From this position, she and WPGF were able to gently push the district into adopting policies helpful to parents. For instance, when local restructuring teams were introduced to the district, the LEF was instrumental in ensuring that parents were well-informed about these teams before they were implemented. The efforts of WPGF ultimately resulted in the creation of a district-level parent involvement office to carry on many of the projects the LEF had started.

Under Majied's leadership, WPGF had a long track record of consistent funding in the city. Many funding connections came through the Washington Lawyers' Committee on Civil Rights, the organization that was central in the founding of

WPGF and Parents United. By including staff in meetings with funders, Majied hoped to foster relationships that would remain viable beyond her time at the helm, which ended in 1996.

Appendix B: Founding Director Telephone Interview Protocol

I. Founding and Early Years of LEF

1. Please tell me about the founding of your LEF.
   - Impetus/need/initial vision
   - Key players
   - Highlights of founding/sequence of events
   - Funding sources
   - Staffing
   - Knowledge base
   - Board
   - Establishing legitimacy/credibility

2. How were you involved in the founding?
   - Initial contact
   - Other activities at time
   - Motivation
   - Relationship to/role in developing initial LEF vision
   - Challenges and how you addressed them

3. What were the milestones (pivotal points) in your LEF's early development? What was your role during these times (e.g., initiated, reacted to, recognized them)?
   - Key events/transitions/achievements – anything that changed the landscape and/or your LEF's ability to make change

4. What programs did your LEF bring in initially? Why did you pursue these, and what was the value-added? [go beyond mini-grants]

5. When would you say your LEF was truly established (i.e., institutionalized to some degree)? Why? What indicators are you drawing on?

6. How did you personally address the key challenges to sustaining your LEF in its early years?

7. Did you do things that contributed to your LEF's longevity? If yes, what? [Probe only if necessary: fundraising, risk-taking, motivating others]

8. An LEF's success is not defined only by whether it has created many well-funded programs. In areas besides programming, what did you do – and how – that demonstrate your success as a founder and leader of a new LEF? [Greater public engagement; more coordination between agencies and stakeholders; greater access to information]

9. What role did you play in the key relationships that affected your LEF's development in its early years? [Your key helpers/collaborators (inside or outside your LEF)]

II. LEF Organizational Issues

9.What do you feel were your unique qualifications for the role of founding director?

10. Was there anything you needed to learn to be an LEF director? How, and how well, did you learn it?

11. What was your leadership approach initially? How has it changed over the time you've been a director? [Decision-making]

12. When did you bring on additional staff? Why?

13. Who was driving the initial LEF activities: you, the Board, Board chair, a team effort?

14. How much time did you personally devote to director activities in the early years? Did that change over the years? If yes, why?

15. Please characterize your relationship with the school district in your LEF's early years. Did it change? If yes, why and how?

16. How did the superintendent(s) perceive your LEF? Why? How do you think he/she felt about you and your role?

17. Imagine a continuum for LEFs. At one end the LEF serves as an agent of the district, at the other, as an agent of the community. Initially, where was your LEF on this continuum? How has this changed? [be sure to explore validity of this question with respondent]

18. How have things changed for directors since your LEF's founding?

19. If you could pass on a lesson to today's directors, what would it be?

III. LEF Context

20. Please confirm your LEF's founding year: _____.

21. Please describe the community served by the LEF at the time of founding (e.g., socio-economic class, race/ethnicity of members, involvement of parents/community in public schools).

22. What was the community's perception of public education when the LEF was founded? Who were some key players at that time? [Probe only if necessary: quality of schools, teachers, district administration, degree of engagement in reforms, sufficiency of reforms, etc.

23. Were there other issues related to schools, e.g., teacher strikes, shortages, high staff turnover, relationships within districts/schools, specific reforms pursued by the district?

IV. Background of Respondent

24. Previous experience – nonprofit, education, private

25. Educational achievement (highest degree and in what area)

26. Where living (in the community served by LEF at time of founding?)

V. Questions About Case Study Methods

27. How difficult was it for you to remember details about the founding of your LEF? Can you think of any artifacts or approaches that would help you recall events better and in more detail (e.g., timeline, minutes)?

28. To whom would we talk today to shed light on your role as founding director?

29. Availability for case studies ...

Appendix C: Preliminary List of Topics To Be Explored in Future Research

Contextual Information

- Founding year
- Geographic location
- Urbanicity
- Number of students, districts served
- Community demographics and changes over time
- School reform climate, current and past
- District leadership and changes
- Local politics over time
- Presence of local funders
- Presence of local non-profit organizations
- Presence of local businesses or corporate headquarters
- PEF/PEN

Executive Director Leadership

- ED characteristics (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic class, living in community, child in public schools)
- Perception of importance of ED characteristics
- Executive Director experience (e.g., non-profit, education, private sector)
- Executive Director personal qualifications and distinctive skills (including strengths and weaknesses)
- Reasons for getting involved
- Executive Director time allocation (and changes in allocation over time)
- Number of years as Executive Director
- Changes in LEF leadership needs
- Leadership transition

LEF Organizational Development

- Founding (e.g., initial vision, urgency, funding, key players)
- Key relationships and their roles (e.g., PEN, Board of Directors, mentors, district, schools, collaborators and partners, community)
- Inclusiveness of community in LEF work (e.g., which segments were involved)
- Turf issues (e.g., negotiating LEF role with other extant organizations)
- Programs and policies (e.g., types selected and why, source, focus and changes in focus)
- Staffing (e.g., decisions about who to hire and why, staff development)
- Challenges and facilitating factors
- Key events, transitions, and achievements
- Institutionalization

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